

Chapter Four

Art of Identity and Resistance by Nepalese Dalits

Locating and Identifying Nepali Dalits

Social construction of Nepal is quite similar of India. Nepal and India have so much shared history. Varna system same as India is present in Nepal, may be in more crude form as we know monarch had a great faith in Manu smiriti. Manu smiriti is a Hindu scripture which clearly supports birth based varna system and advocates discriminatory practices against Dalits . Dalit people of Nepal are very similar to Indian Dalits in structure and in castes. There is barely any Dalit caste which is not found in India. According to many scholars people of non-Mongoloid race migrated from India to Nepal . Nepalese Mongoloid those who call themselves KHASA claim to be aborigines of land. 17% of Nepalese population is Dalit according to some sources. Though there are many views on exact population of Dalits in Nepal, but government recognized Dalits constitutes 17% population of Nepal. In Nepal the word Dalit is used in governments documents and the word Dalit is official ,unlike India where Dalits are recognized as scheduled castes by government .

The term Dalits means the oppressed groups but it is highly politicized and contested nature of caste discourse in Nepal in recent years. Dalit is a self-inscriptive term recently adopted by leadership of various formerly low caste groups to distinguish themselves from the Hindu high castes. Dalits is used to refer only to those groups categorized by the law and who belong to formerly untouchable castes. Mary Cameron¹¹⁹ in her ethnographic article titled 'Many Dalits: Debating Identity in a New Nepal', examines the articulation between two kinds of discursive realms (Urban

¹¹⁹, Cameron, Mary M. 2010. Many Dalits: Debating Identity in a new Nepal. In Dalits of Nepal: Towards Dignity, Citizenship and Justice. Arjun Guneratne ed. Lalitpur: Himal Books, pp34-42

activists' quest for political identity and rural Dalit agency emerges from inter caste exchanges in mixed caste communities) involving Dalit identity and caste relations in Nepal. She presents a case of an old, rural Dalit woman from Bajhang, waiting outside the doorway of a Thakuri home for *riti maagnay* (economic and social transaction between artisan and high caste farmers). This is an example how caste is still dominant factor in Nepalese society. The woman was asking small handful of salt and a piece of turmeric root. On the contrary, Dalits intellectual claimed that they have been discriminated socially, culturally, economically and religiously and some of them have been working within the caste reform or dismantle movement and asked that their real name be used to differentiate Dalits from other group in the name of identity. Explicitly, importance of caste eradication and intermingling needs of rural Dalits and perpetuation of Dalit category for the politics of identity are undergoing among activist Dalits in Nepal. Dalit activists are dynamically negotiating the symbols of identity politics, agency as political identity with attendant desires for power, in the country's post revolution democracy.

I would like to Analyzes genesis of the term Dalit, etymological meaning and its usage among intellectuals, academia and everyday life world of common people. The term was first introduced to Nepal by India's most famous untouchable, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar when he visited Nepal in 1956. It was used in the name of the first organization in Nepal to address untouchable issues, Rashtriya Nepal Dalit Jana Vikash Parishad in 1967. The term Dalit is still unfamiliar to people and Dalit themselves in many rural communities in Nepal. The two sets of discourses for and against the continuation of Dalit symbols are presented throughout her writing. By presenting discussions of the internet community, Nepaldalinfo,¹²⁰ the author vividly

¹²⁰ URL-<http://www.Nepaldalinfo.20m.com/>

analyzes for the retaining and elimination of the symbol Dalit. Some activists argued that the term is regarded as a symbol of pride and heritage rather than emblem of scorn, and one that presents and unifies different groups of people with similar history of oppression. Therefore the word Dalit captures the legacy of unique oppression and experience for separate identity in Nepal. In the defence of the criticism of the term an Indian product, the author quotes Om Prakash VK Gahatraj "it is right, many things are imported from India including foods, and culture, because we are an open border. Truly when Baba Saheb Ambedkar came in Nepal on 1956 and had important discussions with the Dalit leaders of Nepal, since then the word Dalit was used to address this community"¹²¹. On the objection of the use of the symbol Dalit, the author quotes many activists. For instance, Prakash Nepal said," when someone calls Dalit, I feel humiliated no matter how qualified I am...A doctor, an engineer, a scientist, a teacher, no matter who we are, we are tagged as Dalit...which will make our generation shameful forever" . Similarly, Dr. Ramesh Sunar said," I do dislike the term Dalit. It comes across like a gaali (insult) to me. No one is born Dalit. We are made to be Dalit...by describing yourself Dalit you are propagating the belief the other side forced upon us and accepting your position in the society" . This type of dialogue is still undergoing among Dalit intellectuals in Kathmandu. Urban activists' identity discourse and the case of rural Dalit appear asymmetrical connection because the roles of rural artisan on social change, livelihood strategies and new identity seem invisible in the mainstream identity politics that needs further study on micro-macro and agency-structure linkage of identity processes among Dalits of Nepal. My argument is that asserting Dalit identity does not create similar meaning for different categories, socioeconomic status and strategic location of Dalits.

¹²¹ Folmar, Steven. 2010. *Identity among Dalits in Nepal*. In *Dalits of Nepal: Towards Dignity, Citizenship and Justice*. Arjun Guneratne ed. Lalitpur: Himal Books p.18

Steven Flomar fleshed out dimensions of Dalit identity politics, including a set of actions that are called the politics of anonymity to attempt to further comprehend Dalit resistance to their social oppression.

Flomar has reviewed renowned academic literature of caste system and summarized his ethnographic observation he has made on issues of Dalit agency, or 'their culturally constrained ability to act'. It indicates to a particular kind of socio-political action that is akin to identity politics, within which domain as he indicates the multiple ways identity is managed, and how each action was employed as a strategy to regulate relations with others. Flomar presents case of a Brahmin (Acharya), who lives nearby Dalits' settlement and shares meat(foods) with Damai and Sharki on holidays and freely entered each others' house in Jharuwarasi. As the author presented, it could be argued that informal education classes, foreign labor migration, migration also changed orthodox caste system in the local level. Dalit models of identity are various in local levels that Flomar called 'everything is experiment'. My argument is that identity politics is very much strategic and contextual with local understanding of life success and long term livelihood in the particular community.

Dumont believes that the logic of caste hierarchy is based on a synchronic ideology of ritual status not on the "historical processes of exploitation and discriminations"¹²². But in the historical process and the genesis of the performance rituals, we find that the basic contradiction between the so called caste purity and the perpetuation of the process of exploitation by relegating to the Dalits their roles to handle the performing arts and yet remain segregated from the mainstream culture dominated by the Brahminic ideology, continues to form the basic pattern of domination

¹²² Cited in Mary M. Cameron, *on the Edge of the Auspicious: Gender and Caste in Nepal* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 19998) p.11.

On the other hand new generations of Dalits have entered the process of advocating greater freedom, access and respect in public discourse.¹²³

Dalits do not constitute a homogenous group. Like other ethnic/caste groups in Nepal, their population is fragmented and their heterogeneity extends to region, language, religion and culture. Moreover, there is a clear caste hierarchy within their ranks. Among Dalits, one group claims to be superior to another in terms of life-cycle rituals and many aspects of their day-to-day life. It can be said that Dalits themselves perpetuate the caste hierarchy despite opposing the practices of higher castes. More specifically their heterogeneity and hierarchy can be better explained in the following three broad regional groups identified by Dahal.

To understand the Nepalese society we must keep in mind that Nepal is a landlocked country with high mountains. There are mainly three geographical regions 1. Terayi - Terayi area is adjunct to India and people residing here have more than 90% similarities with Indian society in terms of social structure, language as well as culture. 2. Pahad-second region is called *PAHAD* means hilly region. In this region many Mongoloid tribes like Kirati, Newari reside. Third region is *PARAVAT-Parvat* means mountain. This region is a high altitude area, with some of the highest mountain in the world. People from all over the world visit this region for the purpose of tracking. This mountainous region dominated by Mongoloids and the population of Dalits is extremely low. In Nepal due to thousands of years of cross breeding it's common to see any Dalit with Mongoloid features.

(1) Dalits in the hill community: Broadly speaking this group comprises three major Hill Dalit groups in the Eastern and Central Regions: *Kami* (blacksmith or

¹²³ Folmar, Steven. 2010. Identity among Dalits in Nepal. In *Dalits of Nepal: Towards Dignity, Citizenship and Justice*. Arjun Guneratne ed. Lalitpur: Himal Books.

ironworkers), *Sarki* (cobblers or leather workers) and *Damai* (Tailors and Musicians). In the Western, Mid-Western and Far-Western Development Regions, there are many groups within them such as *Gaine* (singers and musicians) and *Badi* (entertainers and dancers), and many subgroups within the broad cultural groups of *Kami*, *Damai*, and *Sarki*. Linguistically, the mother tongue of this Dalit community is the Nepalese language and they follow the Hindu religion.

2) Dalits in the Tarai community: The Tarai Dalit community as a whole can be grouped into three broad linguistic groups: *Maithili*, *Bhojpuri* and *Awadhi*. The Dalits of the Eastern and Central regions speak Maithili as their mother tongue whereas the Dalit part of the Central and Western regions speak Bhojpuri and the Dalits of the Western and Far-Western regions speak Awadhi as their mother tongue. By tradition, they are Hindus and employ their own priests to perform rituals. The Dalits or untouchable groups in the Tarai community are as follows: *Tatma*, *Khatwe (Mandal)*, *Paswan (Dushad)*, *Mushahar*, *Batar*, *Dhobi (Baitha)*, *Chamar (Ram, Mochi)*, *Dom*, and *Halkhor*.

3) Dalits in the *Newari* community: *Newars* are considered to be the earliest Inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. The Dalit Development Committee identified the following *Newar* groups as Dalits – *Kusule* (death specialists, musicians and tailors), *Khadgi* (butchers and milk sellers), *Pode* (public sweepers), *Chyame* or *Chyamkhala* (sweepers, scavengers) and *Halahalu* (scavengers).

3 Although *Kami* is commonly translated as blacksmith or ironworkers, I prefer to use the term metal workers as this group also includes castes involved in working with

gold and other metal such as copper and bronze. For a detailed listing of the low caste Hindu groups or untouchables recorded in the Far-Western Hill region.¹²⁴

5 Most *Tarai* untouchable castes are landless castes who work for higher castes as agricultural laborers. The issue of whether groups belonging to the *Newari* community should be called Dalits has been under controversy with the momentum of the *Newari* indigenous (*Adivasi*) movement, the complexity of the inter-sectionality of caste and ethnicity in Nepal in the case of *Newars*. The *Newars* of Kathmandu Valley represent a particular case. They have their own intra-ethnic caste ranking from Brahmins down to untouchables and are the heirs of a centuries-old high culture shaped by Buddhism and Hinduism. Ethnographic studies that have been done on *Newars* highlight the complex caste hierarchy and caste-based practices among *Newars* in the Kathmandu Valley¹²⁵

The leaders of the *Newari* adivasi movement have now been successful in categorizing *Newars* as an indigenous nationality of Nepal. Their main contention is that the *Newars* are the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley who speak a Tibeto-Burmese language (*Newari*) and have their own culture and customs, but who were forced into the four-fold Hindu *Varṇa* system by Rana rulers. Hence they have been denied their cultural and linguistic rights and do not have adequate representation in government.

¹²⁴ Dahal, Dilli R. 2010. Hindu Nationalism and Untouchable Reform: The Status of Dalits in Nepalese Society. in *SASON Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. Dilli R. Dahal and Laya P. Uprety eds. Volume 1. Kathmandu: SASON. P.p.9-13.

¹²⁵ (<http://www.nefin.org.np/component/content/article/115-information/347-indigenous-nationalities-ofNepal>).

While other ethnic groups without a caste hierarchy were clear about being called Indigenous groups or nationalities, whether *Newars* should be called indigenous or not became controversial. Some *Newars* and many non-*Newars* opposed their inclusion in the first official list, on the grounds that they were neither backward nor a homogeneous cultural group. Moreover, *Newars* as a whole have the highest developmental indicators, even higher than those of upper-caste Bahuns and Chettris. The Nepal Human Development Report 1998 shows that *Newars* are economically better off than any other Nepalese community. Therefore, there was an economic argument for the de-listing of *Newars*. Despite the controversy, *Newars* are now on the list of Indigenous nationalities of Nepal.

What complicates the situation for a group like the sweeper caste (*Deulas*) who is listed as an untouchable caste under the old legal code and were considered Dalits is the question of where this group fits in the *Newari* indigenous movement, since, clearly, they are still stigmatized and excluded because of their caste-based occupation. Originally, the Ministry of Local Development had included the names of *Newar* Dalit castes like Khadgi (Kasai), Kapali (Kusule), Kuche, and Dhobi. However, *Newar* activists and some *Newar* Dalit groups made a petition to the National Dalit Commission in 2003 to exclude their names from the Dalit category, asserting that *Newars* were an indigenous group. They also argued that castes like *Khadgis* or *Kasai* and *Kusules* were categorized under “impure but touchable castes” and could not be put under the Dalit category. The National Dalit Commission excluded their names from the Dalit category. Subsequently, they did not register themselves as Dalits in the 2001 census.

The sweeper caste group petitioned to be kept within this category. In 2010, they were listed under the Dalit category in the list compiled by the Dalit NGO Federation and

were also registered as Dalits in the 2001 census. Despite this, the issue of whether a *Newar* group like the *Deulas* belongs to the category of Dalits remains ambiguous, the controversy of wanting or not wanting to be labelled as Dalits still continues to swirl. Recently, the Deula Society carried out a demonstration saying that they will resort to violence if the government does not include them among the Dalit group.

An activist from the sweeper community raised concerns about the issue of representation of low caste *Newars*, pointing to the fact that the *Newar* Indigenous movement is led by affluent and high-caste *Newars*. He was concerned that the advocates of this movement were trying to integrate all *Newar* groups into the *Newar* Indigenous movement without addressing the caste issue. Some pertinent questions he raised were: What are the long-term implications of not being called Dalits even though one might still face caste-based discriminatory practices, for example, in the case of sweepers, because of one's stigmatized occupational caste status? Who has the right to speak on behalf of lower castes *Newars* like *Deulas*? What benefits will they get from being called indigenous (*adivasi*) as opposed to being called Dalit? How will a distinction be made between affluent *Newars* and non-affluent *Newars*? Can non-Dalit *Newars* speak on behalf of the historically oppressed lower caste *Newar* groups?

Where does a group like sweepers (*Deulas*) fit within this movement? In this regard the current leaders have not been able to effectively address the heterogeneity of the *Newar* communities. The case of the sweeper caste is an example of how a formerly untouchable group is caught between classifications as an indigenous group and as a caste group, although they fit in both groups. This complex inter-sectionality has not been addressed by the leaders. It remains to be seen whether this community will be successful in getting their names included as Dalits because such categorization has far reaching implications. NEFIN has tried to justify the diversity by saying they will

give priority to economically oppressed groups, although they do not say how. For example, the NEFIN website's categorization of Indigenous nationalities of Nepal includes the following: endangered group highly marginalized group, marginalized group, disadvantaged group and advanced group. *Newars* are categorized under "advanced group." There is no sub-categorization under the advanced group even though *Newars* are a heterogeneous group. What is unclear is how they will make a distinction between different classes without alluding to occupational and hence caste statuses of groups like sweepers and those below them. In other words, will the fight for cultural and linguistic rights trump the caste status of communities like *Deulas*? The latter speak *Newari* and suffer language discrimination, are deprived of their cultural rights but are at the same time discriminated against because of their caste status. What happens if Dalits are granted more representative rights and if *Deulas* are disallowed under the category of Dalits and instead categorized under indigenous group? Some of my respondents in the field were concerned that they would have to face long term consequences if they lost their Dalit status, especially if the new constitution has a more favourable proportional representation/affirmative action policy for Dalits.

The case of the sweeper community then speaks directly to the complexities of questions of identity and resistance. Given this basic historical contextualization of the research problem, the following section provides a brief explanation of the empirical parameters used for this research.

The Nepal Dalit Commission (NDC) identified and listed three categories of Dalits of Nepal. Among them Terai Dalits are most marginalized sections and among them Musahars is the lowest socio-economic group. Dahal presents cases of upward social mobility of Dalits by radical improvement of their economic situation. With

references of case studies of Teli, Sudi and Kalwar from Tarai; and Kasai from Kathmandu, Dahal claims that economic status supports upward caste mobility¹²⁶. His point is caste and socio economic statuses of people are complementary to each other. The author concluded that Dalits themselves have the deep rooted psychological inferiority complex, encouraging the social exclusion model within their structure. Relatively better educated and rich Dalit groups practice social exclusion within Dalits. Economic improvement plays important roles to enhance political and social status and gradually upward social mobility from the untouchable to analyze Dahal's argument, it is clear that Dalit is neither socio economically homogeneous caste groups nor culturally unchangeable throughout history. There are so-called Dalits who are socioeconomically and politically higher status than so called high caste groups. Their heterogeneity and hierarchy can be better explained into three broad regional groups: Hill Dalits, Tarai Dalits and Newar Dalits. Among Hill Dalits, Kamis are treated highest in social rank and they have better economic status too. The Badis are the lowest hierarchy and the most marginalized among Hill Dalits. Among Tarai Dalit Halkhor, Dhobi, Chidimar and Dushad are better position than Musahar and Dom. Their literacy rate is also indicator to show socio economic status of the group. The highest literacy rate among Tarai Dalits is the Halkhor (31.3%) and the lowest is the Musahar (7.3%) In terms of social exclusion, Krisha B. Bhattachan analyzes that practices of untouchability, in his term "greatest crime against humanity" is one of hallmarks of Dalits' exclusion in Nepalese society Since Dalits are still struggling for the elimination of all form of caste-based discriminations, proportional representation at all levels and reservation in politics, education and employment; he claims that the

¹²⁶ Dahal, Dilli R. 2010. Hindu Nationalism and Untouchable Reform: The Status of Dalits in Nepalese Society. in *SASON Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. Dilli R. Dahal and Laya P. Uprety eds. Volume 1. Kathmandu: SASON

discourse of social inclusion is like "old wine in a new bottle" in Nepal. In the eastern Tarai majority of plain migrants are of poor low caste but are dominated by minority high caste migrants' leadership wherever they settle." As important to the question of hill or plain cultural dominance in the Tarai as the factor of caste ranking is the factor of economic status. The two are related, that is, low caste migrants virtually have low economic status".¹²⁷ Economic categories like farm labourer, caste–occupation are poor, low caste people, who have little capacity to exert influence in local community affairs. "Such affairs are, as a rule, the domain of the largest of the landowners and occasionally shopkeeper's importance".¹²⁸ Increasing job opportunities create decreasing economic dependence on high caste landowners and further forebode a social and political independence as well. Socially and economically marginalized section of people were ranked on bottom of hierarchy, called untouchable in course of nation-state formation. Aahuti has focused on historical materialistic relationship and economy is the infrastructure of caste based discrimination by imposing fatalistic religious ethos. Higher caste categories tend to legitimize the existing caste system by giving it an aura of divine origin; both genuine personal beliefs and bad faith to perpetuate the status quo act on the creation of this sentiment. Dalit intellectuals are divided on main approaches of emancipation and many of them are projected in international NGOs that weakened Dalit liberation movement in Nepal. Contemporary forms of lower castes labour in Nepal are a historical consequence of their positions in society. This historical perspective on labour, attempts to bring into "increasingly

¹²⁷ Gaize, Frederick H. 1975. P.78 *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*. Delhi: Vikash Publishing House PVT.LTD.

¹²⁸ Ibid.p.80

complex patterns of occupational multiplicity in the category of 'agricultural labourer'".¹²⁹

There is no doubt that NGO's are playing a major role in the upliftment of Dalits, they are into advocacy, making plans and strategy for them. But due project nature of NGO's it is difficult for them to carry forward any long term or social, political agenda. Their works are confined to the limits of given project.

To begin with categorical opposition between the pure and the impure Louis Dumont holds through that it entails two aspects. The first aspect is hierarchy by which he means that the pure is superior to the impure and that the two are in complementary relationship; the second aspect is separation, whereby the pure must necessarily be kept apart from the impure central interest is to ask how untouchables of today's India go about making a positive conception of self for themselves, while simultaneously launching a deep critique of core Hindu values. His concern is with the problem of self making of the untouchable under condition of adversity. He tries to us content, form and style of a way of thinking that has been fashioned by Chamars to take advantages of the opportunities for social redress afforded them by democratic ideology of India. Chamars ideology is contrasted by themselves, of who they are and who they wish to be. The author depicts that how Chamars of Lucknow turn social dependence into a strategic political resource, and how they 'compose a tenable, coherent voice from within their dependent culture'¹³⁰ Steven Parish points out in the context of caste societies of South Asia, people are not merely Homo Hierarchicus – to use the gloss of French Structuralist Louis Dumont- though they are certainly influenced by the

¹²⁹ Cameron, Mary M. 2010. P. 217 *Many Dalits: Debating Identity in a new Nepal. In Dalits of Nepal: Towards Dignity, Citizenship and Justice.* Arjun Guneratne ed. Lalitpur: Himal Books.

¹³⁰ Khare, S.R. 1984. *The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamar.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. P. 17

values of hierarchy; they are not solely constituted by hierarchical premises, but also have moments of insight into the social order as a constructed political order¹³¹ Gopal Guru depicts Dalit Movement in Indian that was total alienation of Dalit groups from natural and human resources. This economic deprivation geared multidimensional marginalization of Dalits. There has been continuous erosion of Dalit corporate identity after Ambedkar on the other hand there have been constant attempts on the part of the Hindu communal forces to Hinduised Ambedkar for the subsequent assimilation of Dalits into Hindu fold.

Economic liberalization and globalization phenomena develop new class. The traditional hierarchy of caste based consumer culture has been diluting day by day. In this globalization context of peripheral culture, Katharine argued a person may be 'low caste' in the context of traditional patronage relations, but upon earning a cash income and accumulating 'modern' consumer goods, the same person may identify and ultimately become identified as 'middle class'. As they enter into wage relations outside their neighbourhoods, that is, low castes loosen the patronage bonds assigned at birth, thus transforming the meaning of their caste identity and local landscape of power¹³².

The story of caste based discrimination is same as of India. As Nepal is a majority Hindu society and they follow a strict Hindu ritualistic life which declares Dalits as outcaste. As well as Nepal is heavily influenced by Manu smriti: the code of Manu, which has been considered the rule book of caste based discrimination in south Asia.

¹³¹ Parish, Steven M. (1997). *Hierarchy and its Discountents: Culture and the Politics of Consciousness in Caste Society*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.56

¹³² Rankin, Katharine N. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Markets: Economic Liberalization and Social Change in Nepal*. London: Pluto Press. P.14

Dr Ambedkar is also considered ideologue of Dalit movement in Nepal. Nepalese society, culture and politics are heavily influenced by India. Many of the top Nepalese leaders have studied in India or have been to India. Nepalese Maoists have close connections with Indian Maoists. Social structure of Terayi region of Nepal and India is almost same, same caste, same language like Maithili is spoken in some districts of Nepal, though Nepalese nationalists are critic of Indian role in Nepal and always sceptical about role of Indians in Nepalese politics. In Nepal India is seen as a aggressor country by many Nepalese as well as by Nepalese masses. Even there was an anti-india wave during Maoists heydays and it is still present in Nepalese people disputes like *KALA PANI* and other petty border disputes have also severed Indian Nepalese relations. Though there is harmonious relation among Nepalese and Indian Dalits because of same issue and caste similarities. One lady activist of there is acceptance of Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar in the Dalit movement in Nepal and many claim themselves as Ambedkrite but there are very few among them who want to convert to Buddhism as a change. Most of them want to remain with their caste identities or fight without being religious. Dr Ambedkar had visited Nepal in 1956 to attend World Buddhist Conference and was very disturbed to see the plight of the untouchables there. He visited many Dalits villages and colonies in Lalitpur and Deopatan area of Kathmandu and expressed his disappointment. One of the great Dalit leaders Late Mohan Lal Kapali took Dr Ambedkar to various places where living conditions were utterly pathetic. According to Om Prakash Gahatraj, a leading Ambedkarite in Nepal,¹³³ ‘When Baba Saheb visited Dalit Basti (Area) and saw the worst condition of Dalits; he became angered against the attitude of Nepal Govt. towards Dalits of Nepal. Seeing the anger mood of Baba Sahib, the liaison officer

¹³³Ravat ,vidyabhushan Dilemma of Dalit movement in Nepal
URL-<http://www.countercurrents.org/rawat120514.htm>

who was associated on behalf of Govt. in the visit reported the anger of Baba Saheb to the Prime Minister of Nepal (Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya). After the return of Baba Saheb to the Guest House (Sital Nivas), Then Prime Minister Hon. Acharya invited Baba Saheb to his residence to talk about this matter. When Baba Saheb showed his reluctance to go in his residence, Hon Acharya himself came to the Sital Nivas and assured to Baba Saheb to give due attention to the development of Dalits’.

Fundamentals of Nepalese Dalit Aesthetics

Aesthetics is study of nature, human society and its interrelation with arts. When beauty of nature and human society interact it produce wonderful results. In terms of social consciousness and Marxist perspective it looks into social class formation. Depiction of social life and is must for evolutionary people oriented arts. Sense of aesthetics grows from lower to higher level, and this is the basis of development of aesthetic theory.

Here in Nepal many Dalit thinkers and activist are in favour of amalgamation of Marxist perspective with Dalit aesthetics. Maoist and other left movements in Nepal paved a path for Dalit emancipation in Nepal. In Nepal Maoist also used to have their cultural wing. Many Dalits were active in those cultural wings. The work of cultural wing was to educate masses through songs, skit about class consciousness.

Ghanshayam Dhakal asks “who needs Dalit aesthetics?”¹³⁴ What is the relevance of Dalit aesthetics? This is indeed a peculiar question. Dalits are oppressed class. Hindu caste system has created classes in the form of castes. The way of Dalit liberation is simple and straight. Dalit liberation is similar to class liberation. They should fight a fully fledged war with oppressor in the form of cultural production and counter

¹³⁴ Dalit soundary shashtr , 2014.sambhavna re swarup .edi.maharjan ,rajendr.samta foundation.p.65

culture. Marxist aesthetics is most suitable for resistance. The idea of class liberation is more approachable for a Dalits rather than arguing them about Hindu social system. Both Dalit question and class question can catalyst each other. He further argues that without Marxist perspective, Dalit aesthetics are baseless. Ghanshayam Dhakal, here seeing Dalit problem from the Marxist perspectives. For him this is all about class. But he forgot to interpret that caste overlaps class and no matter how rich is a Dalit, he remains untouchables in the views of supporters of upper caste people.

The contradiction of the caste- based society and be seen in the very process of relegating different roles to Dalit groups in the society. The greatest contradiction and the hypocritical foundation of the Brahminic religious-aesthetic construct can be seen in the role of performances assigned to the social classes like the Damais, Gaines and Badis. Each of these castes has been traditionally assigned roles in the performance culture of this country. The main components of the performance are related to music, musical instruments, dancing and drama.

Dalit performances do not follow dialogical texts, nor do they follow any improvisations of dramatic nature. The interactive power of the Dalit performance is acquired through the dynamism of the moments and occasions. The recipients are those who recreate their thrills for the festivals or occasions like wedding, *rites de passage* or any other such moments. Dalit performance art does bring the community together, creates a *mélange* of various socio-cultural practices, and brings the deities and the humans and future hopes and present reality together. The theatre of the performance is thus a space as well as the psyche of the audience who wake up to a new reality of life, for example, when the performers create music, perform dances or present short plays. The most important performance in the hills the music created by the Damais *Panchai Baja* band. But the contradiction is that a caste-created gulf

separates the performers and the recipients. Despite all the closeness that people feel on the occasion when the performances are made, ensemble of musical instruments is played and dances are performed to the music, upper caste groups maintain a distance with the performers who are considered lower in caste, who nevertheless perform the most important role to reinvigorate people's spirits on the occasion. Now Damais are using Panchai Baja as a tool of protest.

There are many practices in the plains Nepal too, which follow similar patterns as practiced in the Indian rural areas like the Dalit performers coming to present dance-dramas, not too long in duration, on various happy occasions like wedding and birth, especially that of a male gender.

Groups of people and social classes who have been assigned the roles of performances, especially in the domains of music, dance, singing and dramatic presentations on different occasions in the ritual cycles have for long been performing the roles as part of their caste privileges. But the privileges they have been perpetuating for centuries and even for millennia have served as the means in the hands of those who wield power through ruling and maintaining religion-cultural superiority to perpetuate an institution of oppression and domination in the society. The patterns of such domination can be seen not only in Nepalese society but also in other countries of South Asia, especially in India where various forms of performance art and dramatic presentations have been the sole responsibilities of the class of people in the society who have taken up their roles as performers, which shows their caste groupings and their status in the society. The roles relegated to them are thus taken as their 'hallowed' professions in the society.

Ironically, performance culture and arts have been the life sustaining professions of people in different cultures. The minorities in the society and those who have for

generations been denied any access to power and role in the administration and social works have taken up music, singing and entertainment as their main professions. Such groups abound in India where the caste system works at all levels of the society. The 'Gypsies' and minstrel groups in Europe and Asia always taken up the performance culture by staying on the periphery of the central social norm dominated by the privileged or high caste people. The Gypsies performance culture is a matter of exigency, the principle mode of sustenance and survival. The tradition of performing art among the Gypsies has survived on the periphery of the metropolitan cultures that they encounter, and they present their performances under tents and open places, caravans and stages.

Thus the groups of people who play music and perform dances and plays are said to be ritually less pure in the caste hierarchy. But paradoxically, the people of the lower *Varna* group has occupations with what they consider as defiling features perform music and dance at the time of the rites of passage and different ritually purifying occasions of the people of the upper castes.

Nepalese Dalits like the Dalits in the Indic socio-cultural structure are part of the cultural formation as strongly as the people of the upper caste groups. They are not alien nor are they travellers like the Gypsies or other visiting cultural groups. The Dalits From the integral part of culture, and paradoxically, the roles they play within the system of the rituals is as central as those played by the priests. But a differentiation is maintained through what Mary M. Cameron calls 'material resource asymmetry and the perpetuation of privilege'. She believes that people remain dominated not through the force of ideology alone but also through the practices and

techniques of domination..... and the material advantage of the dominant'.¹³⁵ Dalit who have taken up music and performance present their arts as part of the tacit acceptance of the domination.

Though Nepalese Dalit society is quite similar to Indian Dalits in terms of Caste and social structures but still there is a scope of differentiation due to geographical and social and political factor. Indian Dalits have had different socio cultural background as compared to Nepalese Dalits. During Muslim and British reign many movements of Dalits occurred but in Nepal it was passive. Due to monarchy Nepalese Dalits had had a relative tough time in comparisons to Indian Dalits. *Muluki-Aine*, Nepali constitution was influenced by Manu smiriti. Intermingling with Mongolied¹³⁶ races created a new Dalits in Nepal.

If we only take an example of the role of the Damai-music and the inevitability of the presence of the Damai musician on important occasions in the ritual cycles of life of the Brahmans, Kshetriyas and other caste groups higher than the musical performers, we can see the nature of the contradiction between the roles of the Dalit performers and that of the caste-based society. The Panchai Baja is played on all auspicious

¹³⁵ Mary M. Cameron, *On the Edge of the Auspicious: Gender and Caste In Nepal* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998) P. 51. Cameron in her book focuses on the status and position of women within the Dalit groups. In her very interesting analysis she examines the position of women within the Varna-Caste nexus. I particularly find her study interesting because she has analysed the problematic of the caste hierarchy and gender relations in a society where the position of women across caste groups relations in a society where the position of women across caste groups bear strong resemblances with one another and the character of the male-dominated society shares a number of features when we talk in terms of the predicament of women in the society. To my mind, a strong analogy with the Dalit women would be the position of the African American women whose black community is, as Richard Rorrey said in one lecture given at the Himal Association in Kathmandu in September, 2011, looked upon as a caste group by the white American society.

The Dalit women do not play any significant role in the performing arts. The musical groups like the Damais and Ganes assign women their roles in the households. Except for a few cases where women play some light instruments, I have not seen women taking part in the performances. On the auspicious occasions when the *Panchai Baja* band is played women are not given any share, which reflects the sexual prejudice within both the society of the Dalits as well as those of the other caste groups in the society.

¹³⁶ Though there are Mongolied Dalits also in Nepal. In Newari community which is also Mongolied has a good stock of Dalits within. Here in context is racial mingling of Dalits with communities like Kirat, Rai, Limbu, and Gurung.

occasions of the higher caste groups. In all the *rites de passage* of the Hindus like wedding, sacred thread investiture ceremony of upper caste group boy, known as *Vratibandha*, and most of the festival in the calendrical and the agricultural cycles like *hile jatra* and *bethi Panchai Baja* is necessary. The contradiction can be seen when the Damais without whose performance no religious rite can be accomplished are given not only a role but also a space where to perform. They are not allowed to enter other spaces where the rituals are being performed. Carol Tingey rightly says, "In examples, such as these, the role of the musician could not be considered as either that of entertainer or status symbol, he could only have been fulfilling a ritual function".¹³⁷

Gaines, the very well known troubadours in Nepalese society have a very historical association with the culture of this country. They are like the singers of Serbia and African countries who sing the saga of the nation, narratives of epic grandeur and the stories of the communities. *Gaines* are basically singers who visit people's houses and sing songs about historical incidents, love, faith and battles. Their presentation and the style of singing evoke social drama the stage of which is the mind of every listener.

The representation of the Dalits in various other forms of performances has been the accentuations of their stereotypical roles as performers. Their representation in the broader social dramas, most prominently the cinemas produced by the non-Dalit groups of people is made in the already constructed 'discursive spheres'. By citing Goldberg, Robyn Wiegman says, "race and ethnicity are social constructions linked to the specific discursive spheres within which they are used".¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Carol Tingey, *Heartbeat of Nepal. the Panchai Baja* (Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 1990) p. 178.

¹³⁸ Robyn Wiegman, "Race Ethnicity and Film" in Johan Hill and Pamela Church Gibson ed. *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 1998) p. 161.

Performance arts have strong folk base. The other very interesting feature of the Nepalese Dalit performing arts is its rural flavour. In earlier times the performance of the musical bands like the *Panchai baja* had purely attributive significance. The band is associated with the Damais class just as the fiddle Sarangi is attributed to the troubadours called Gaines. The Dalit roles are strongly maintained in the folk cultural and ritual practices but with the growth of urbanization, the roles of the Dalits have been taken over by the professional groups in the metropolitan areas. The wedding bands, for example are no longer comprised up of the Damais in the urban areas. Therefore, Dalit performing arts survive in the rural areas. The most important point to consider, I think, is the symbiosis that the Dalit performing arts have with the ritual and calendrical cycles of the festivals of the society, a fact that only reflects the paradox of the caste-culture nexus and the contradictions of the value system of the Brahminic culture that has for millennia been sustaining a pattern of cleavage among the people of the society created to perpetuate a system of control and exploitation in different domains of the caste-ridden society.

But to assume that the Dalits have only been playing the shadow music to the Brahminic society is to ignore the great traditions of theatre and dramaturgy that the Dalits have created especially in South Asia over the millennia, and their impact on the modern performing culture that is vibrant and creative.



[A government hoarding in Remote Mustang district asking not to practice untouchability. Imagery is impressive as you can see a dog besides the woman who is feeding water dalit from a safe distance. photo-taken by me.12june 2014]

Role of non-governmental organization in Dalit movement of Nepal

Like other under-developed countries Nepal has become a hot-spot for international NGO's. Thousands of Ngos are working in the country on various issues, from human trafficking to Dalit empowerment. Every social movement is being guided by these organizations in Nepal. Unlike India instead of political parties and groups, in Nepal NGOs has become flag bearer of social movements. Since they have resources, they make strategies, plan and execute their programmes. Most of the NGOs' employees work as paid social activists. It's a profession for them. I have seen most of the workers of these Dalit oriented NGOS are themselves Dalits. They know the problems very well they know the society to whom they have to serve. Most of the funding to Nepalese Dalit NGOs' comes from western world, countries like United

States of America, Germany, Norway, United Kingdom have poured a lot of money in Nepal.

When I was roaming in Nepal, I came to know about Jagran media centre, an organization of young Dalits media professional who are working together and run a community radio. Jagran media centre has made so many programmes on Dalit theme like Songs, skits, plays and discussion.

They have a radio station at various places of Nepal and broadcast these programmes. They have recorded many songs which are against untouchability and talks of social equality. From Jagran media centre I got a collection of Dalit songs. These songs are about every aspect of life. From the new anti untouchability laws to inter-caste love affairs, range of these songs is very broad.

Organization like Jagran media centre are using visual and performing material to bring awareness among masses about evil of caste discrimination. They are regularly organizing radio programmes and engaging people in dialogues. Through there radio they have reached to almost 75% area of Nepal. Hindi translation of a Nepalese song

इंसान इंसान में क्या अंतर है ?

छाती पर हाथ रखिये

आत्मा पर हाथ रखिये

आत्मा को इंसान इंसान में क्या अंतर है ?

छाती पर हाथ रखिये

आत्मा पर हाथ रखिये

आत्मा को साक्षी बनाइये

सब इंसान एक हैं

कोई फर्क नहीं है

तुम भी वही हवा सूँघते हो जो हम सूँघते हैं

हम भी वही पानी पीते हैं जो तुम पीते हो

फिर क्यों भेदभाव करते हो ?

What is the difference among men?

Put your hand on chest

Put your hand on your soul

Make your soul witness

All human are same

There is no difference

You inhale the same air which we inhale

We drink the same water, which you drink

Then why do you discriminate



A Poster by Jagran Media Foundation

This song is composed and recorded by Jagran media centre. It directly questions caste based hierarchy. This is denial of all those scriptures which support hierarchy and discrimination on the basis of Varna/caste.

बदलियो रे संसार

संसार को बदलिये

मुझे ऐसे संसार में घूमना है

जहाँ जातीय भेदभाव ना हो

जुल्मी लोग क्यों जातीय भेदभाव करते हैं ?

Change this world

I have to roam in a world, free of caste discrimination

Why do people discriminate on the basis of castes?

Another song created by Jagran media centre educate people about new law established by government to curb discrimination on the basis of caste

विभेदा को नया कानून आयो

The meaning of this song is like this

A new regulation has been implemented to curb the discrimination

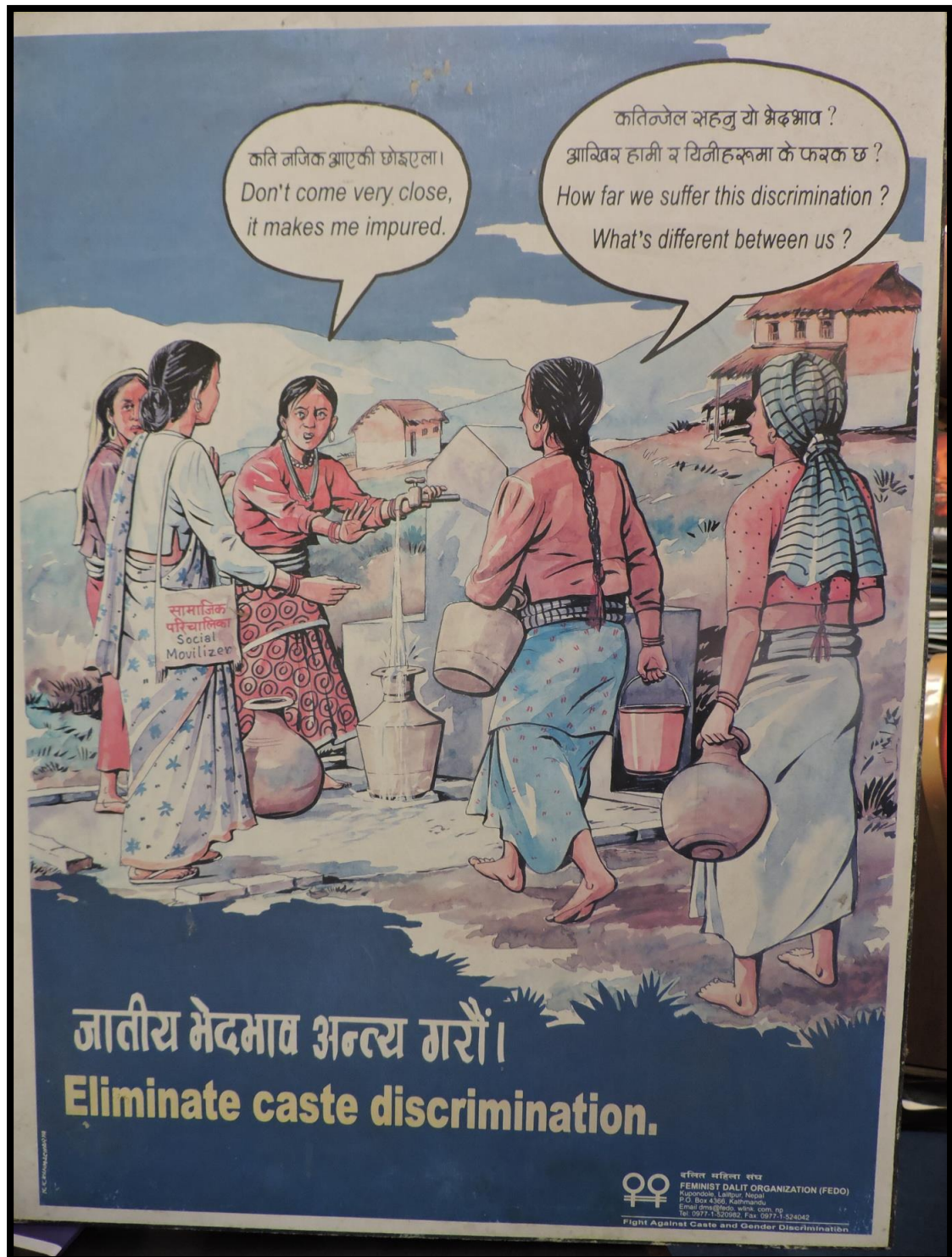
Be aware of this law

Administration is taking up action those who will discriminate on the basis of caste

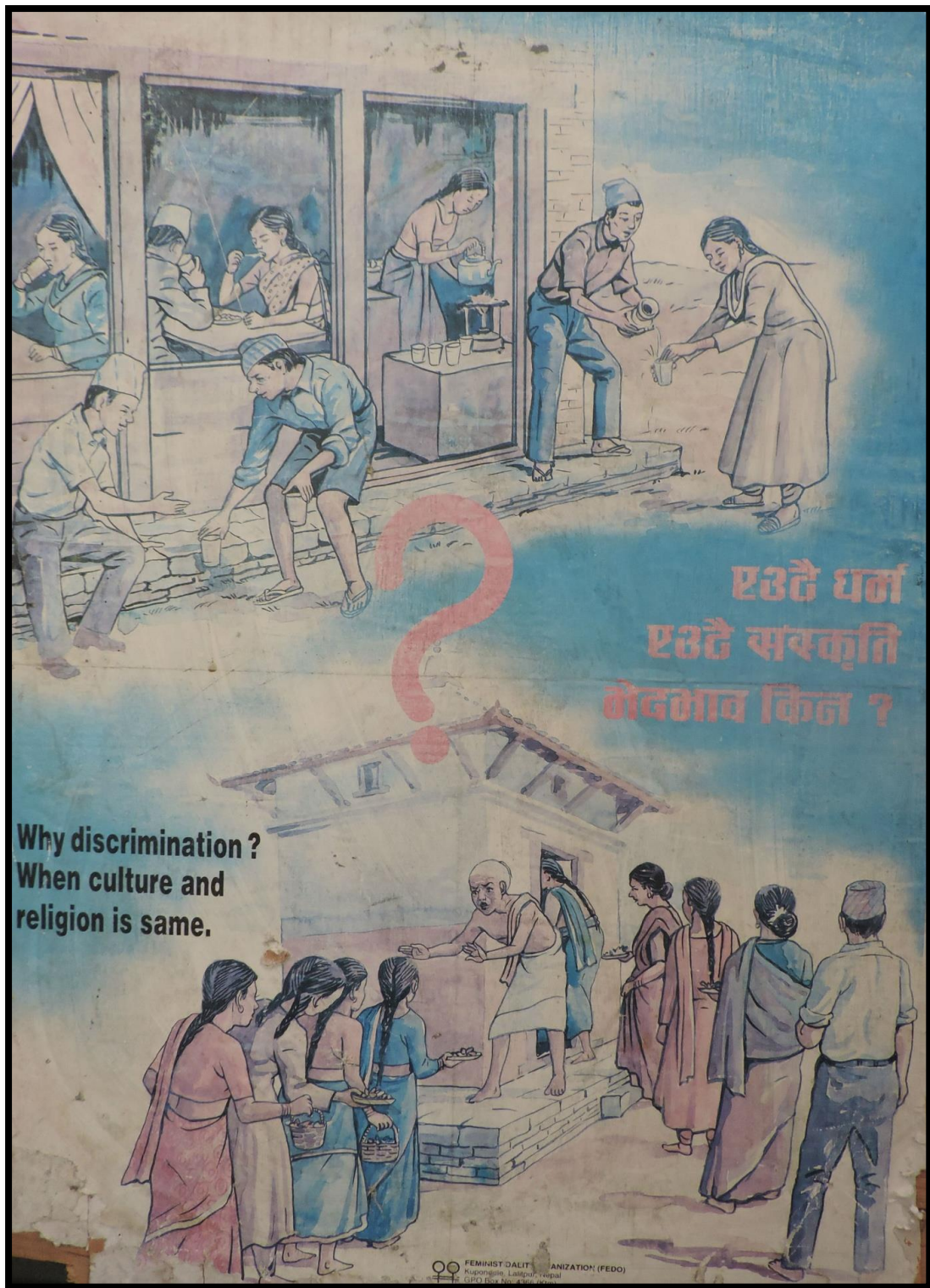
20thausnand rupees penalty will be imposed on them who will not violate this law.

These types of songs are regularly aired by Jagran media centre's community radio which is operated in various districts of Nepal. These songs are very popular among Dalits of Nepal. These songs composed and aired by Jagran media centre's radio,

which is a good way to communicate with folks who are living in remote areas. The Jagran media centre which uses high tech community radio is good way to spread awareness and the message of emancipation among the locals.



A poster made by FEDO



A poster made by FEDO

WANDERING GANDHRVAS

Gandhrva is a musician caste from Nepal. They are descendents of mythical Gandhrvas people who used to entertain gods and goddesses. Now their main occupation is petty jobs and playing Sarangi to entertain people. They are visible in markets of Nepal, they play Sarangi in moving vehicles and on pavements, people give them alms. I went to their organization's head office in Thamel area of Kathmandu. This head office serves as a meeting point and resting place for wandering Gandhrvas. Kamal Gandhrva told me that they have organized Gandhrvas under one banner and working for their upliftment and regularly demanding government for the welfare of Gandhrvas.



Gandhrvas at their union headquarter in Kathmandu. (photo taken by me)



Gandhrva Raju showing his skill (photo by me @village Bansgarhi, Butwal, district Rupandehi.Nepal)

Gandharvas, since time immemorial, have been recognised as the musician caste of Nepalese society. Long before television and radio came into existence, these people would travel around the villages playing music and spreading news, much in common to Europe's wandering minstrels, playing this musical instrument that looks vaguely similar to a violin, following tourists through the crowd hoping that one of them would buy their instrument. And some of you probably have been influenced by them and at times even been irritated by their presence. But behind that simple facade is a man desperately fighting for survival, not only of his own against poverty but that of the Nepalese musical tradition against the influence of increasing western musical culture. Competing with the blaring Bob Marley on the stereo being played in the restaurants, these nomadic musicians of Nepal sing songs that belong to every heartbeat of the Nepalese. He is a Gandharva with his Sarangi. King Prithvi Narayan

Shah, who unified the various scattered kingdoms to form the Kingdom of Nepal, employed Gandharvas to sing the glory of the Shah Dynasty. They were used as a means of propaganda during the unification period and were sent to villages to sing in favour of a unified Nepal. The Gandharvas learn to sing their unique songs and play the Sarangi in a traditional way – elders pass on their skills to younger generations. The Sarangi is a true Nepalese musical instrument. The name SARANGI is a combination of two words. ‘SA’ - the first note of music (parallel to DO as in DO, RE, ME .) and RANGI meaning colourful. So the instrument that colours up notes of music is called the Sarangi. Similar musical instrument can be found in other parts of the world. For example, the western violi Sarinda, the Indian musical instrument probably is the closest in resemblance to the Sarangi. The method of making the Sarangi is unique to itself. The Sarangi, a one-piece instrument having a neck and hollowed out body, is carved out from a very light wood, locally known as Khiro. The wood is cut into a length of about a foot. The body is carved into a hollow frame with two openings. The lower opening is then covered up with dried sheep-skin. The original strings were made out of sheep intestine. The village people allotted intestines of sheep, sacrificed during major festivals like Dasain, to the Gandharvas. The Gandharvas left the intestine in a pot for some days. Once the meat was fully rotten, it was pulled out, leaving behind the fine nerves of the intestine which were then woven to get the strings, which produced fine quality sound. However these days, readily available nylon and steel strings are more popular with Sarangi players as they do not have the time to prepare the traditional variety of strings. Wedge like keys are hammered on to the neck of the Sarangi to serve as screws for tightening the strings. Horse-tail hair was originally used for the bowstring of the Sarangi but these days nylon strings are preferred.

As a result of the wide exposure of our Nepalese society to the outside world and vice versa, over the past few decades, we have lost a lot of our traditional culture. The dominant western culture has slowly trickled into our society and hence everyday we seem to lose a little bit of our identity. For example, Harbaja, an instrument once popular among most of the old Gandharvas is not played anymore. The elders among the new generation Gandharvas recall the time 'when fairies danced to the tune of the songs and the Harbaja played by the Gandharvas'. The Sarangi could encounter the same fate as the Harbaja if nothing is done to preserve the tradition. Sadly, nothing is being done.

Socio-political assertion through art forms of Nepalese Dalits is based on my field study. To conduct my field study I first went to Butwal - headquarter of kapilvastu district. Kapilvastu is a place associated with birth of Buddha in Nepal. Some of my friend told me that I must visit Bansgarhi village 22 kilometres away from Butwal to meet Gayne people. Gayne caste is associated with singing and playing Sarangi. This is the main occupation of Gayne people of Nepal. Gayne people claim that they are decedents of mythical Gandhrvas. Gandhrvas was a species mentioned in ancient Hindu scriptures, the main work of Gandhrvas to entertain Devtas by singing and playing instruments.

After reaching Bansgarhi I enquired where I can meet Gayne people. Apart from Gaynes I also met some families of Pariyar caste. Pariyar are also into singing and dancing. They are traditional drum beaters of Nepal. They play drum on many occasions like outside temple in wedding ceremonies and on other occasions. But this is not fulltime profession of all Pariyar. Most of the Pariyar are into tailoring. They sew clothes for people, but nowadays they are also adopting other profession like labourer, coolie and some have migrated abroad in search of good jobs. Panchai Baja,

the symbol of Pariyar people is must for many religious, social occasions. It is giving them a new meaning, a new identity. Raju Nepali, one Gandhrva told me that earlier we had patronage, but now we are forced to beg for money on roadside. We are descendents of Gandhrvas, who used to entertain Gods. Many Gandhrvas got famous due to their singing skill. Jhalakman Gandhrva is such a personality, who became very famous for his songs all around Nepal. We sing every type of songs and our Sarangi is a tool for protest too. We are no less than any so called upper caste.

Kachahari Theatre of Nepal

Though many Dalit ngos are using theatre especially street theatre to aware people about multiple issues faced by Dalits but one particular form of theatre attracted me a lot. Because it was theatre of oppressed by definition and really is being used by one of the most depressed people of the world this article was published by Guevara and I enquired about this while I was in Nepal. Guevara visited Sindhuli in 2005, when whole Nepal was burning in Maoist and government conflict. Guevara wanted to understand violence, performance theory and theatre activism. Maoists were using this theatre form for their propaganda throughout the Nepal, through Maoist it was introduced to Dalit activists of Nepal. They wanted to utilise this theatre of oppressed for social change. To bring social equality and to end caste based discrimination¹³⁹. Kachahari theatre of Nepal is forum theatre. Forum theatre is a form of theatre. Forum theatre is a type of theatre created by the innovative and influential practitioner Augusto Boal as part of what he calls his "Theatre of the Oppressed."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹URL- https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/193876/Guevara.pdf

¹⁴⁰ **Forum theatre** is a type of theatre created by the innovative and influential practitioner Augusto Boal as part of what he calls his "Theatre of the Oppressed." Boal created Forum theatre as a forum for teaching people how to change their world. While practicing earlier in his career, Boal would apply 'simultaneous dramaturgy'. In this process the actors or audience members could stop a performance, often a short scene in which a character was being oppressed in some way. The audience would suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage in an attempt to change the outcome of what they

In many countries this forum theatre has been used to counter racism¹⁴¹ though this forum theatre of Sindhuli was particularly about violence which has erupted among.

This forum theatre is being used by many NGO's in Nepal for educating masses.

Forum theatre is playing a very good role in spreading awareness and for boosting self confidence of Dalits.

Interview of Aruna Hingmang –Painter

Social assertion through Painting: Work of Aruna Hingmang

During my Kathmandu trip I came to know about one Dalit lady who paints especially on Dalit and feminists themes. Sometimes she has mixed both topics together that means Dalit and feminism. Putting two issues together makes her work more

were seeing. This was an attempt to undo the traditional actor partition and bring audience members into the performance, to have an input into the dramatic action they were watching. In 2006 it has been recorded as the most used way to help new people in the theatre.

Boal developed and practised an orthodox methodology for forum theatre based on the interaction between his actors and his so-called "spect-actors". The spect-actor attempts to overturn the oppression using some method unused by the actors, whilst the actors portraying the oppressors improvise to attempt to bring the production to its original, scripted ending. If the audience believes that the spect-actor's actions are too unrealistic to be utilized in reality, they may call out "magic!", and the spect-actor must modify their actions accordingly. If this spect-actor fails in overthrowing the oppression, the actor resumes their character, and continues the production until another spect-actor calls out "stop! or freeze!" and attempts a different method.

If and when the oppression has been overthrown by the spect-actors, the production changes again the spect-actors now have the opportunity to replace the oppressors, and find new ways of challenging the oppressed character. In this way a more realistic depiction of the oppression can be made by the audience, who are often victims of the oppression. The whole process is designed to come to a conclusion through the consideration of opposing arguments, rather than where an argument is one-sided and pushed from the actors with no chance of reply or counter-argument.

<http://dramaresource.com/strategies/forum-theatre>

¹⁴¹ in 2012 theatre director Donna lamb organized a theatre workshop regarding racism problem The workshop continued to address issues of domination and oppression in the second part by looking specifically at how racial domination and oppression plays itself out in the lives of white Americas and the organizations they belong to.

Donna began by speaking about the fact that we can all just take it as a given that we are fallible human beings, and if we don't examine ourselves, our liabilities will interfere with what we hope to accomplish in our social justice work. She said, too, that due to the racist climate that permeates everything in the US either subtly or directly, to be a white American is to have racial issues. She told of several places she frequently sees racism working in herself and how necessary she believes it is for all whites to keep working on these issues and never feel they have graduated.

Everyone agreed that a major part of the solution is taking responsibility and being more aware of how racism shows itself in themselves and in their organizations, questioning what they see in society around them, stopping being so afraid to discuss racism openly both with other whites and with people of color, and looking for greater chances for cross-cultural dialogue.

interesting. She had no formal art education. She is a self taught artist. When I called her she invited me to her home which is also her studio to have a glimpse at her work. She is bright and her imagination is fantastic. She paints in oil on canvas. Her subjects are mostly around life of Dalit women. She told me that there is not much scope for painters in Nepal as market is very small so most of the painters want to migrate abroad and especially to India, where they can fetch good price for their work.

She has also made some amount by selling her paintings and she was featured on Nepal television, magazines and newspapers. But most of the media introduced her as a feminist painter not as a Dalit feminist painter.

She told me that she wanted to be more specific to Dalit women issues but there is a lot of struggle for a painter like her to be established as a Dalit woman painter so she also made some paintings on feminist themes.

Aruna's work is testimony of her struggle which she had throughout her life, her aspiration and her desire in a new democratic Nepal where Dalits are first times considered human in last 3 thousand years gave her a new inspiration and boost to dedicate work to the Dalits. Her philosophy, her definition of aesthetics is very simple. She wants her viewers to feel pain and agony felt by a Dalit and especially a Dalit woman.

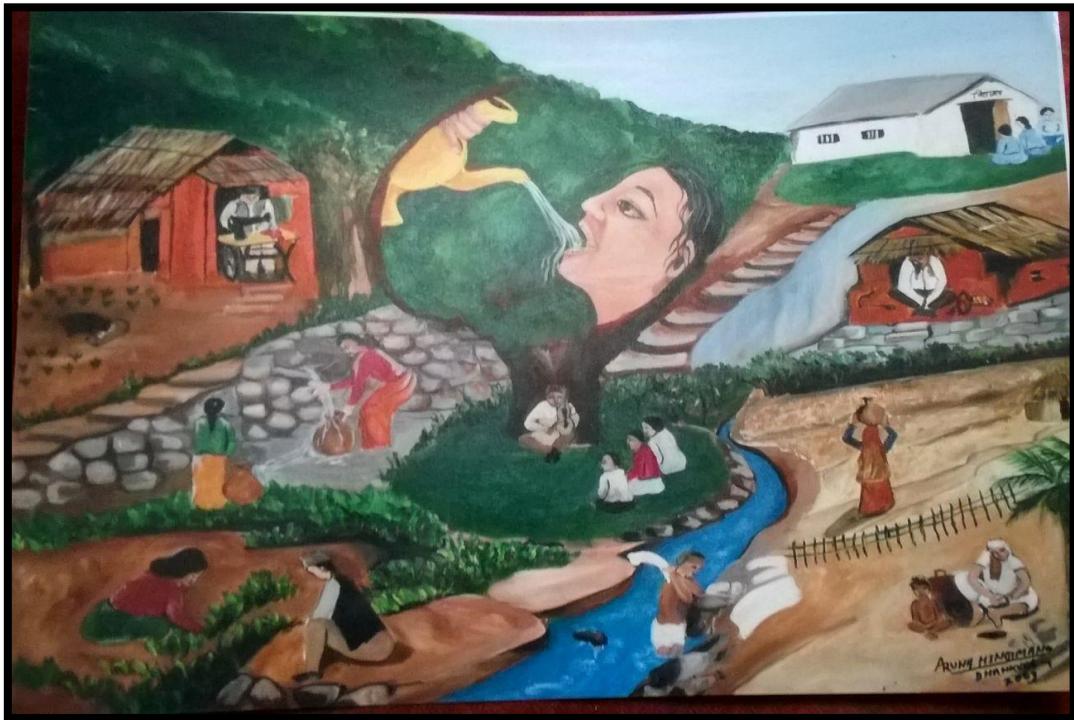
Her paintings are published in many Dalit magazines and on the cover of books. Her art is self reflection as well as revolves around the Nepalese life. She is famous in Nepal for her painting revolving around life of Nepalese Dalit women, which depicts plight of a wife of a migrant worker, village women and social hierarchy. When I asked her about the Hindu scriptures which supports social hierarchy and

discrimination she replied she did not believe in such God which discriminated us on the basis of birth.

She advocates equal rights for women as well as for Dalits. She told me that in general Dalit women are more vulnerable in a casteist and patriarchal societies like that of Nepal and we must counter check it in different ways and the way I have chosen is art. She wants more facilities and support from the government to empower Dalit women. Aruna Hingmang is one of the few women who work exclusively on contemporary social themes. She said though it seems Dalits are progressing very fast in new and democratic Nepal but this is not reality as the pace of progress is very slow. She tells “I have faced severe criticism from the upper caste art critics. Most of the People are unable to understand my art in Nepal; they think I just paint on rubbish themes.” Aruna’s works reflect her personal agony which she faced during her young days as a Dalit woman. She has tried to break the normal notion that Dalits are not creative and they do not have a fine taste for arts. In Nepal though opportunity for an artist like Aruna is quite limited, when I interacted with her I asked her what’s her views on Nepalese and Indian Dalits, she told me the situation is same in Nepal and India, but due to reservation Dalits have succeed in grabbing power in india and got stake in government jobs but on the other hand in Nepal Dalit have some different types of problems as they are not part of higher decision making bodies. She said Dalits have played an important role in the unification of Nepal they have joined king PrithviNarayan shah during his unification campaigns. It has already been mentioned that people of Gayne community played an important role in unification of Nepal¹⁴².

¹⁴² <https://jesiwagle.wordpress.com/2015/03/13/gaine-traditional-media-man/>

They used to roam around and sing ballades in the praise of Prithvi Narayan shah and his unification campaigns.¹⁴³



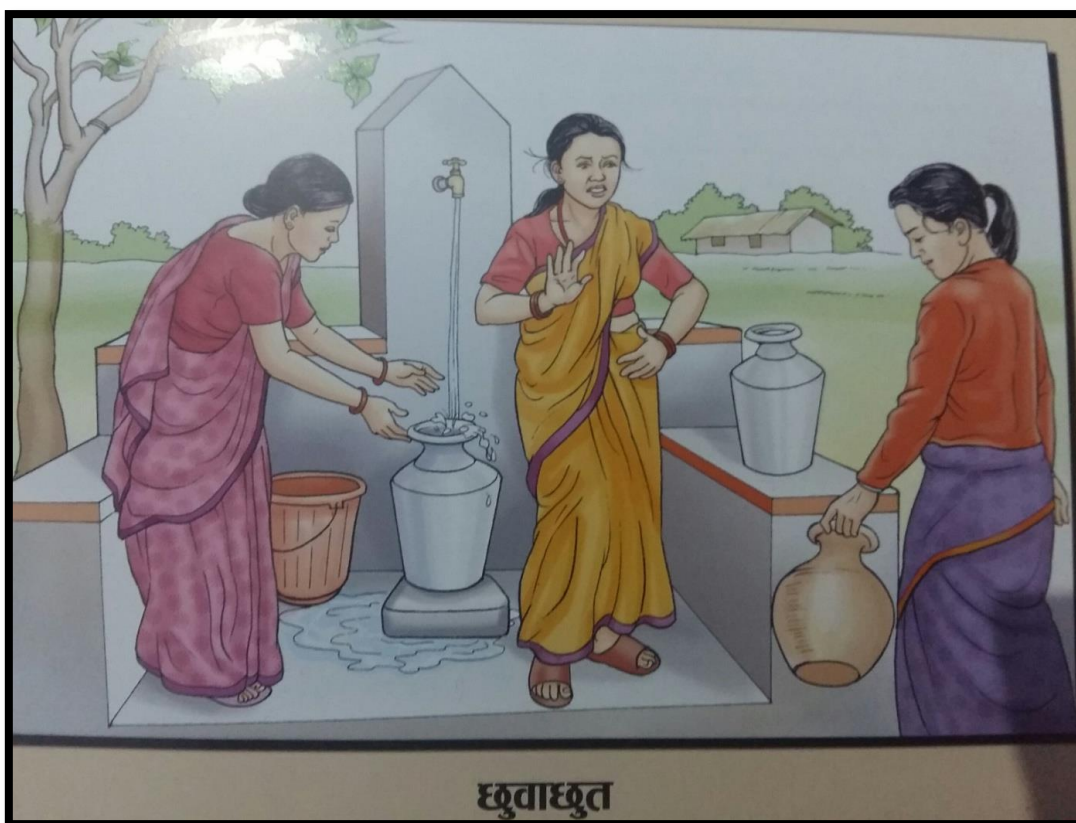
[A very impressive painting By Aruna Hingmang. title “Dalit life and Nature” different caste person are depicted in this painting. One Damai [tailor] One Sharki [cobbler] one Gandhrva and One Dhobi [washerman] is visible in natural setting. One Dalit woman is waiting at a distance for her turn for fetching water. Aruna says Dalits are very close to nature, though they are not forest dweller but they are connected with mother nature on the other hand a monstrous mouth is scene which is grabbing all the water of a water stream into his mouth. Symbols of feudal upper caste]

¹⁴³ Interview was held on 5 june, 2014,1pm ,Kathmandu,Nepal



[Painting by Aruna Hingmang on untouchability. A Dalit woman's pitcher is being poured by water from distance, pain and helplessness is visible in her eyes]

Many NGO,s especially Jagran media centre and feminist Dalit organization are working to promote Dalit culture through art forms like posters, songs and dramas. To enquire more about I have interviewed Durga Sob: founder of Feminist Dalit organization



Poster by FEDO

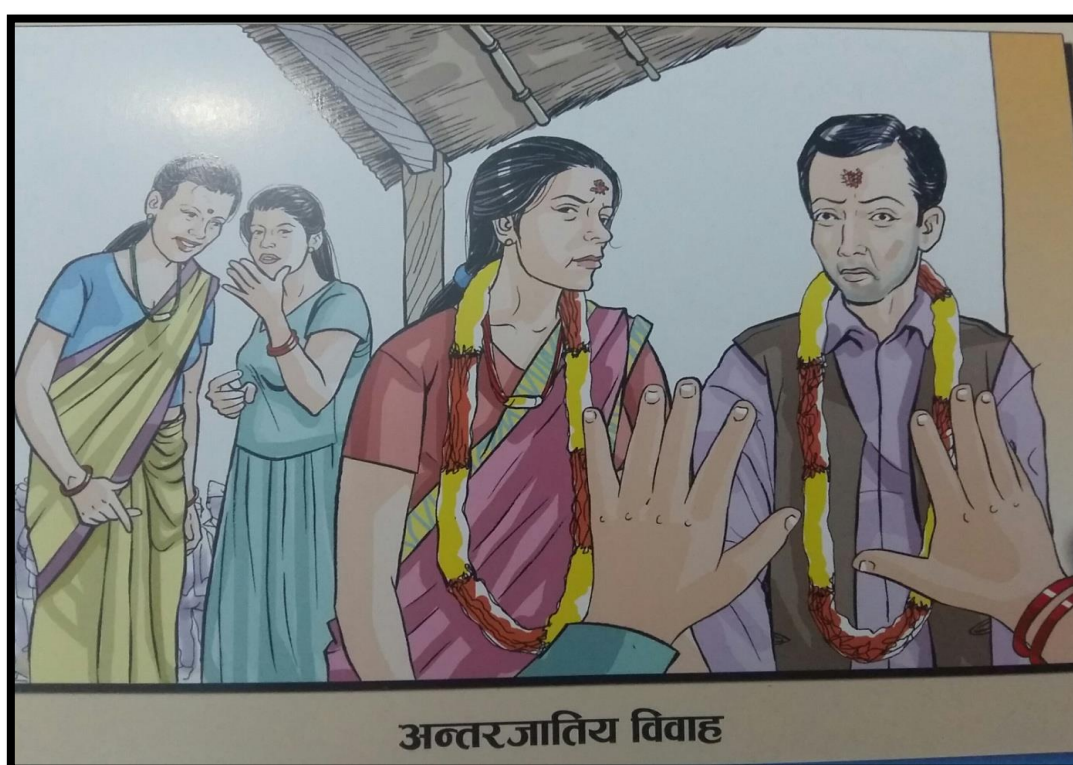
INTERVIEW OF DURGA SOB: FOUNDER OF FEMINIST DALIT ORGANIZATION

FEDO is the most notable Dalit organization which was founded in 1994. Its founder Durga Sob told me “it is the first organization of its type in the whole Nepal, which represents the voices, problems and needs of Dalit women. Even after the establishment of democracy, the situation of Dalits remained unchanged. They are still facing problems such as caste discrimination. The plight of Nepalese women is miserable in general and the situation of Dalit women is even more deplorable. They face both gender and caste discrimination.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Interview of Durga Sob was held on 11 a.m. 4 June, 2014, Kathmandu, Nepal

She further states that “voice of Nepalese women has been neglected throughout history which continues till today. There is scarcity of resources that reflect the values of Dalit community and their contribution in nation formation. To deal with such situations we are trying hard to educate Dalit women about their rights, although the process is slow however there has been some success. On a regular basis we organize workshop of Dalit women. Women folk from all over Nepal come to our workshops and meetings. We have composed many songs and made several paintings and posters to educate them in an interactive way”.

I asked her what is the role of songs and posters in educating Dalit women about their rights, to this she replied “art is a very important tool to educate masses and visual medium is more powerful than the text. Painting is more appealing to the masses than a novel”.



Nepalese government is supporting Intercaste marriages with Dalits by giving 1 lakh rupees. [A poster made by FEDO]

Manish Harijan: Roaring paint brush

Manish Harijan is a young painter from Nepal. He graduated in fine arts from Kathmandu University. Manish Harijan is a controversial contemporary Artist of Nepal. He was born in 1985, the western Himalayas village of Nepal in the poor family background. He did his **Bachelor Degree in Fine Art** from *Kathmandu University*, Kathmandu. Manish works is inspired by a childhood of destitution, social domination, cast discrimination and poverty. His sees his work as the voice of the speechless which he tries to represent in a modern way. In life he has struggled to exist within the traditional social limits, the discrimination in society and the traditional view of caste still dominant in Nepal, especially within the lives of ‘the Dalits.’¹⁴⁵

Manish was in news in September 2012, when in an exhibition, some of his paintings were severely criticised by Vishav Hindu Parishad [Nepal]. He portrayed Hindu Gods and Goddesses with western super heroes. Manish is vocal against caste atrocities his community faced. He is young enthusiastic and rebellious. His work and medium also shows his rebel nature, sometimes he make mix-media for his work.

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/photos/world/nepal-calls-for-freedom-to-express/photo-6684Ru-5uPjmRxpQwgQ6WeK.html>



[Super Kali by Manish Harijan]

Cultural and Folk Songs of Musahar

One of the most neglected and marginalised dalit community in Nepal is of Musahar.

The Musahar were traditionally rat catchers, and there is still uncertainty as to their exact origin. This Hindu Mythology story shows how they are perceived in the traditional Indian and Madhesi Nepalese society, Parmashwar (the Hindu creation God) created man and gave him a horse to ride. The first Musahar decided to dig holes in the belly of the horse to fix his feet as he rode. This offended Parmashwar, who punished them by making them rat catchers. They are found in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and north Madhya Pradesh and Terai region of Nepal. The Musahar speak the Bhojpuri dialect of Hindi and Nepalese. The word Musahar is said to be derived from moos, a local Bhojpuri and Sanskrit [Moosak] word for a rat, on account of their traditional occupation as rat catchers. It is said that Musahars are culturally

rich. They have own deities, regular celebration of deity in each settlement is collective manifestation of devotion to deity. They have discrete lifecycle rituals. The following cultural songs communicate their cultural identity, rituals and domination.

Tirhut raj Maghai Nagariya...2 (Trihut state Maghada town...2)

Saibari ke santan yai (we are Sabari's descends)

Kul dev ke dhanjaa dekhu (Look the flag of Kul deity)

Musahar ke pahichan yai (it is Musahars' identity).

(The thematic translation of the stanza is Musahars are Sabari's descends from Trihut and Maghadha state. Their deity's flag in each settlement is their identity.)

Bacha Janma din dhami ojha (shaman and Ojha during child birth)

Bolake labia chi sojha (called them for assistance)

Parewa pathi aur phulpati (pigeon, female goat and flowers)

Magaichi laddu pan yai (sweet, Pan collected)

Panchs ghar ke daibhai milke (brothes of five house gathered)

Thali pite dhamsan yai (beat plate to aware child)

(The thematic meaning of the above stanza is shaman and Ojha are called during birthing period. Pigeon, female goat, flowers, sweets and Pan³¹ are collected. Brothers of five houses beat plates to aware child.)¹⁴⁶

Musahar in Nepal want to get rid of their Dalit identity. They want to assert that they are from rich region of Magadh and are not Dalits. Musahar are at the lowest strata of Dalit society in terms of resources and they are proud of their past. Musahar want to attain a new Non Dalit identity.

¹⁴⁶ Report. Giri, Madhu, , 2009, Political Economic Dimensions of Marginalization and Arts of Resistance among the Musahars of East-Central Tarai. Social Inclusion Research Fund (SIRF) SNV Nepal. p.77

Badi of Nepal: Prostitution as livelihood

Badi community of Nepal are around seventy thousand. They are scattered in Terayi district of Nepal. The etymology of word Badi is VADAK meaning of player of musical instrument. Job options are extremely limited for the Badis. Prostitution is traditional profession of Badi women, as it provides much needed income. As Badi girls are born into prostitution, raised to be prostitutes, or are sold into the very large sex slavery industry, Their main profession is singing and dancing and sex work and some Badi men survive on the earning of their female family members. Many NGOs have come forward to help Badis. I met some Badi women in Tulsipur, District Dang. I interview some Badi women.¹⁴⁷

One Badi woman Savita [name changed] told me about herself and about her caste

Q. what do you think of Badi caste? Why they living such a miserable life?

Savita: This is our fate probably decided by God, that we are bound to live in such circumstances. Men from all caste come and pay us to have sex. I wish I born as a princess in next life.

Q. How much you earn per day?

Savita: It depends on how many customers I get a day. I charge at least two hundred rupees for one time sex. On average I get 3 customers per day? But this money is not enough to meet my ends as I have 5 children and alcoholic husband. I am trying hard that my 3 daughters never enter into this profession.

Q. What government did for you?

Savita: Government did nothing for us. People from one organization came and help us sometimes. They distribute condoms and tell about health safety. These people also teach our children.

¹⁴⁷ Interview was held on 1june 2014 11a.m. at Tulsipur,district Dang

Some NGOs are seriously working for Badi people. Condition of Badi people is most pathetic compared to other Dalit caste. Though some NGOs are working with few of them but it seems it will take a long time when the condition of Badis will improve.

There are around 70 Badi women in Tulsipur who are into sex work. Most of them work from the age of 15 to 40 as sex workers. Many of them refused to interact. Many of them wants to go abroad to earn more money through sex trade. Socio-political assertion is rarely found in the arts of Badis, they are also into dancing but it's only for entertainment for their customers. Some Christian NGOs are trying hard to convert them and in this course sometimes they organize cultural programmes for them. These cultural programmes include forum theatre as well as skit and performance of dance. Most of the participants in these events are children of Badis.



[Badi women .photo from <http://okoboji200.org/why-we-ride/>]



Madhubani Painting by an unknown Dalit Nepali woman painter .depicting a woman a leader . A clear depiction of assertion in terms of gender and caste